

ASPBAE's 7th General Assembly: A process of consultation, collaboration, and consensus

This year was an especially important year for ASPBAE as it conducted its 7th General Assembly (GA) – a set of processes which ran through 2016. This was also a momentous occasion as it was the first GA after ASPBAE's 50th anniversary (2014) and the first after the new global development and education agenda, articulated in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Education 2030 Framework for Action, were agreed and set in place.

The 7th GA offered a platform to deliberate on the outcomes of the post-2015 processes, and chart out appropriate civil society strategies and responses, especially at country and regional levels. Furthermore, the GA offered a space for ASPBAE members to jointly chart out ASPBAE's new directions in recognition of the new development and education agendas, the recommendations arising from its broad-based members' consultations on the occasion of its 50th anniversary, and the overall regional and global development and education context. The 7th General Assembly adopted a 'virtual process' where constitutionally-defined obligations related to the Assembly were conducted electronically. The virtual assembly was organised from 12-26 September 2016 to elect the new ASPBAE Executive Council (2017-2020).

An integral part of the 7th GA activities were 13 national consultations organised by several ASPBAE members



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throughout the region between May-July 2016. The national consultations, organised by appointed Country Coordinators, were held to provide a platform to update members on the new education and development agenda, including the emerging architecture and follow up mechanisms. The consultations were also a space for members in their countries to reflect on ASPBAE's work and offer suggestions on its future directions; be updated on the work of ASPBAE and its members in the country; be oriented on the 7th GA processes; and to select the country's voting representatives. Country voting representatives (one man, one woman) carry the vote of all ASPBAE members in

continued on next page...

Contents

- | | | | |
|----------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|-------------------------------------------------------------|
| 3 | EDITORIAL: Taking a problem-posing education approach to strategic planning | 12 | Mapping the next 4 years with ASPBAE's Strategic Directions |
| 6 | Education and development: A kaleidoscope of opportunities and challenges in the Asia South Pacific | 20 | Comments from Strategic Partners of ASPBAE |

continued from previous page...



As part of the 7th GA activities, 13 national consultations were organised by several ASPBAE members throughout the region from May-July 2016.

each of the countries with ASPBAE membership during the General Assembly voting and electoral processes. National Consultations were held in Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Mongolia, Indonesia, Philippines, Vietnam, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Japan, Cambodia, Australia, and New Zealand. In countries where there were only 2 members or less, those members participated in the strategic review and planning processes by email-based consultations.

A culmination of these national consultative processes was a 2-day Regional Strategic Planning Workshop held from 20-21 November 2016 in Bangkok, Thailand. The workshop was designed to build unity on the future priorities and directions of ASPBAE, with the engaged participation of more than 120 participants, including country voting representatives, incoming and incumbent ASPBAE Executive Council (EC) members, representatives of national education coalitions and other ASPBAE members across the Asia Pacific, ASPBAE's strategic partners, and



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ASPBAE staff. In particular, a concrete outcome targeted for the workshop was a set of recommendations to the new Executive Council on ASPBAE's future work and what should inform ASPBAE's new strategic plan (2017-2020).

The Regional Workshop on ASPBAE's Strategic Directions, organised under the theme, '*Consolidating our Gains to Better Advance Transformative Education and Lifelong Learning for All*', was thus designed around four main areas of deliberation and collective reflection:

- **Highlights of ASPBAE's work 2013-2016** where the membership received the ASPBAE Secretary-General's Report of the last 4 years.
- **Understanding the regional education and development context: Opportunities and Challenges** - which focused on analysing the regional and global contextual issues (education and development), the challenges and opportunities that inform/define ASPBAE's current and future priorities



ASPBAE Executive Council (2017-2020) elected by the 7th General Assembly.

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and work, the strengths and limitations of civil society and the movement advancing the right to transformative education for children, youth and adults, and the value-addition of a regional organisation such as ASPBAE in the current civil society, education, and development context.

- **Advancing the Right to Education and Lifelong Learning within the SDGS and Education 2030** - where the present frameworks, critical issues and strategies in education were discussed to help civil society organisations (CSOs) contextualise their advocacy towards meaningful participation in public education policy and program development.
- **Re-visiting the 4 strategies of ASPBAE to enhance their relevance in the changing context** - which involved a more in-depth discussion on the achievements and lessons from the last period on work related to each of the core strategies of ASPBAE, the emergent issues faced and opportunities arising with respect to these strategies; and in this regard, a collective analysis on what approaches work, what can perhaps be done better, or what are new avenues to pursue, set within an understanding of the new/current context.

This issue of *Ed-lines* summarises and offers a snapshot of the discussions and deliberations in these areas during the Regional Strategic Planning Workshop and the prior processes that fed into this culminating event of ASPBAE's 7th General Assembly. It is offered as a record of the rich and thoughtful insights and contributions of ASPBAE members in all the 7th General Assembly processes that will strongly inform ASPBAE's strategic directions for 2017-2020.

EDITORIAL

Taking a problem-posing education approach to strategic planning

By Jose Roberto Guevara, ASPBAE President

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paulo Freire succinctly captured the challenge of how we, as adult educators, can respond to the dynamic context characterised by multiple crises. In reflecting on how context shapes educational practice, Freire described that the “*banking method emphasises permanence and becomes reactionary*,” on the other hand, “*a problem-posing education – which accepts neither a ‘well-behaved’ present or a predetermined future – roots itself in the dynamic present and becomes revolutionary.*”¹

I challenged the participants to take a problem-posing education approach in identifying and responding to the critical contexts that need to inform our strategic planning for the next four years (2017-2020).

At the conclusion of the two-day event, the participants affirmed ASPBAE's core commitments to education as a human right, gender equity, education for sustainable development, and transformative adult learning. However, the participants gave a very strong recommendation that we need to re-contextualise these principles to address this dynamic context of change. The membership also endorsed the four core strategies of capacity building; policy advocacy, strategic partnerships, and institutional strengthening of a long-standing network that ensures that the voice for civil society in the Asia Pacific region is heard and contributes to shaping our common future.

While the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in particular, SDG4, was identified as an important global policy framework that can help focus our strategic planning process, the participants emphasised the need to ground this global framework to the realities of the Asia Pacific region. Furthermore, there was a strong mandate to maintain our commitment for the marginalised sectors, specifically to ensure the participation of the youth, women, indigenous



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peoples, and the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) communities in policy platforms at all levels.

Central to our strategic priorities is to strengthen our capacities as educators and advocates to analyse and understand the complex forces that are shaping our world today – primarily focusing on our contribution to achieving inclusive and quality education and lifelong learning for all. The challenge of capacity building is to distinguish between addressing the visible symptoms, rather than the root causes. For example, the impact of multiple disasters that continue to plague the Asia Pacific are all urgently seeking quick responses to allow communities to recover and to re-build, but too often only until the next disaster.

How do we as educators and advocates help develop a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the factors that contribute to increased vulnerabilities of these very communities to disasters? This requires an understanding of the nature and causes of disasters. Indeed we cannot stop a cyclone or typhoon from happening. But we can reduce the negative impact that a cyclone or typhoon can have by recognising the technical preparations, such as building typhoon resistant homes; by ensuring the social preparations, such as stronger social support mechanisms, and by applying lessons learned from previous experiences of cyclones or typhoons. But as educators, we cannot stop at merely ensuring better prevention to minimise the detrimental impacts of disasters. Neither is it enough that we merely react or increase the ability of these same communities to cope with disaster situations. I argue that we also need to facilitate a better understanding of why we have all become more vulnerable in the first place? This capability to be free to ask and find the answers to

the question ‘Why?’ is at the heart of a problem-posing approach to education that Freire described.

This problem-posing approach helps to begin the journey of transformation - by initially recognising that there is a problem, recognising the symptoms, and, more importantly, the causes of the problem, before we can even attempt to propose possible ways forward. However, in most cases, the root causes of some problems may not be as easy to identify. For example, environmental education colleagues have asked me for advice on how to make climate change real for farmers in the Philippines. I was surprised to hear this, as I had thought we were all experiencing the dramatic changes in weather patterns across the region. But the symptoms were not the problem, according to my colleagues. They had a sense that climate change was an example of a global problem that had very direct, yet very different impacts at the local level. The challenge was how to make the influence of power, in terms of politics and economics, visible enough to appreciate the different contributions to the causes, and the different and often inequitable commitments to financing of the solutions. This situation reminded me of how Freire had described as critical literacy or the capacity not just to ‘read the word’, but to ‘read the world’.²

Now more than ever, understanding recent events such as Brexit, the outcomes of the US elections, the rise of the far right in Europe, the anti-drug campaign in the Philippines, the continuing conflicts in the Middle East, and many more, is requiring us to go beyond simplistic analysis. It is no longer sufficient to “think global, act local.” We need to learn to contextualise the local within the global or to understand our local realities while keeping an eye on the global power dynamics that are at play. The growing influence of social media platforms, often following

news feeds from people who think alike and the rise of what has been called ‘fake news’, poses a greater challenge if we are to effectively ‘read the world’. Indeed, as educators we can no longer rely on pre-determined curriculum, our lives within this dynamic context are what makes up our curriculum. This is the capacity building challenge we face within ASPBAE.

While we are trying our best to respond to this capacity building challenge, we cannot rest in our advocacy to ensure that education continues to be available, accessible, appropriate, and adaptable for all, particularly for the 757 million adults who are unable to read and write a simple sentence.³ The SDGs are meant to be holistic and integrated global goals that aim to ensure that – “No one is left behind.” The multiple crises of climate change and disasters, coupled with long-term conflicts and the rise of nationalistic tendencies, indeed increases the urgency for us to contribute to achieving these global goals.

Therefore, the ASPBAE participants endorsed the need to advance our advocacy work, recognising the unique circumstances that exist across the many countries in the region. This is where ASPBAE will need to rely on the active commitment and strong support of our members, be they national education coalitions, civil society organisations, educational institutions, or individual members. It is within this context that the members have called to expand our membership base in sub-regions where we have experienced a decline in our numbers, specifically in China, East Asia, and Central Asia. There was a growing recognition that not only do we need to strengthen the capacity of our members to advocate in their respective countries, but we need to help them engage with existing sub-regional platforms, like ASEAN, SAARC, and the Pacific Islands Forum. This engagement

¹ Freire, Paulo. (1993) *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New rev. 20th-Anniversary ed. New York: Continuum. Page 35.

² Freire, P. (1985). *Reading the World and Reading the Word: An Interview with Paulo Freire*. *Language Arts*, 62(1), 15-21. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41405241>

³ UNESCO (2015). *3rd Global Report on Adult Learning and Education*. Hamburg: UIL. P. 15. Retrieved from <http://uil.unesco.org/system/files/grale-3.pdf>.

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is not merely due to geographical proximity but because of the shared socio-political-economic context and history that often shapes the sub-region.

While we can at times be overwhelmed by our own regional Asia Pacific problems, it was reassuring to hear solidarity messages from our development partners – specifically the International Council of Adult Education (ICAE) who has committed to exploring how we can share experiences and align our capacity building initiatives. For ASPBAE, this involves the core capacity building programme, the Basic Leadership Development Course (BLDC), and for ICAE, it is the ICAE Academy for Lifelong Learning Advocacy (IALLA). We also heard of a commitment from our sister network, the European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA), to explore joint projects around shared issues like migration. Our other development partners, like the Global Campaign for Education (GCE) and the German Adult Education Association (DVV International), were also present and actively contributed to identifying opportunities for shared actions to address our common problems.

Finally, we recognised that the celebration of our 50th anniversary in 2014 is a testament to our capacity to sustain ourselves as a relevant and responsive network in the Asia Pacific region. And, therefore, we commit to renewing ourselves, by strengthening our internal organisational structures and processes, to ensure that our governance remains accountable and transparent, and that our work remains relevant. The membership gave positive feedback with regards the frequency, amount, and form by which they receive information about our work, although they hoped we would explore more interactive platforms in the future. And we also heard of the commitment of our members to help us find new and innovative funding sources that will contribute to sustaining and strengthening ourselves as a network.

On a more personal note, as this may be the last piece of writing that I will share with the members in my capacity as President of ASPBAE, allow me to acknowledge:

RMIT University for recognising my role in ASPBAE as aligned to our university’s long time commitment to practical learning that contributes to developing – “*A skilled hand, a cultivated mind.*”

ASPBAE staff and the Executive Council members who have often gone beyond the call of duty.

ASPBAE members and our development partners. I have always emphasised that as a network, we are only as strong and as vibrant as the support that we receive from our members and partners.

Throughout the 7th General Assembly process, you have made your voices heard. These diverse voices have shaped the discussion during our strategic planning process. I call on you now to rally behind the newly-elected Executive Council members who have the responsibility of prioritising the many proposals that have been identified and implementing them amidst the reality of dwindling resources. But let me assure you, what we lack in financial resources, we have overflowing in passion and commitment.

The generosity you all displayed during the 7th GA process and the Strategic Planning Workshop is evidence we are more than ready to face the challenges of a “*dynamic present*” to shape our youth and adult learning practice within the frame of lifelong learning.

Together.



“I have always emphasised that as a network, we are only as strong and as vibrant as the support that we receive from our members and partners”.

Education and development: A kaleidoscope of opportunities and challenges in the Asia South Pacific

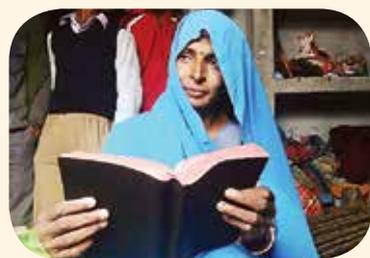
This section summarises the issues, challenges, and opportunities characterising the development and education context of each ASPBAE sub-region (South and Central Asia; East Asia; Southeast Asia; and the South Pacific) as highlighted by ASPBAE members during the national consultations, as validated and further elaborated during the Regional Strategic Planning Workshop, and based on existing literature and reports. It also highlights the members' reflections on the 'value-addition' of regional organisations such as ASPBAE in the current development and education context.

SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA

South Asia is one of the fastest growing sub-regions in the world, being extremely large in terms of land and population with huge socio-cultural and language diversities within and between countries. With 1.6 billion people, the region represents nearly 22% of the world population.

With the largest youth population in the region, South Asia is often seen as enjoying a demographic dividend. However, lack of opportunities, especially decent work, can make the youth bulge a liability and a challenge. Gender issues represent a complex scenario. South Asia has the worst indicators related to violence against women. Gender also plays a role in access to education. Girls are often discriminated on the basis of social norms, honour, and distance of the school. Conflict, sectarian, gender-based, and state-inspired violence destroys lives and communities and offers huge barriers to the overall development of the region. Shrinking democratic spaces, criminalisation of activism and protest, and corruption characterise the challenges to governance, human rights, and democracy.

South Asian countries are closely linked to Central Asia. Afghanistan borders Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. The countries of Central Asia form a diverse political arena with oil-rich Kazakhstan being the largest landlocked country responsible for the region's trade and investment. Uzbekistan has half of the region's population and borders all the countries in the region, thus playing a key role in security. The two smallest and poorest countries are Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, strongly dependent on international aid. Labour migration, mostly to Russia, is a common survival strategy. The economic activity of women remains high and constitutes around 80 women per 100 men. At the same time, women's share in fast-developing



The South Asia context is grim in terms of adult education. The region was home to half of the world's 774 million illiterate adults estimated for the period 1995-2004.

and highly paid sectors is decreasing, industrial and occupational segregation is growing, and more women stay jobless for a long period of time.

While there has been substantial increase in access to primary education in South Asia, overall millions of children - majority

of them girls - are still left behind. India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh account for the majority of the out-of-school and illiterate population in the region. In Afghanistan, a large section of children have no access to schooling. Prolonged conflict has deprived basic education rights to a considerable portion of Afghan children and youth, especially girls. In South Asia, a significant proportion of children in lower primary school lack the most basic numeracy or literacy skills. Another major area of concern is the poor quality of education in the region which reflects low learning levels, high dropout rates, and therefore traps young people in poverty, preventing faster economic growth. Low financing from the government impacts the education system with untrained teachers, lack of education materials, and poor infrastructure. Early childhood education, while expanding in reach since EFA, is far from universal in coverage, with limited investment by governments and donors.

There is also an increase in participation of private actors in education in South Asia. Low allocation of funds by governments has given rise to low-fee private schools. These schools flourish in illegal slum settlements in urban areas, where public schools are absent or poorly functioning. They thrive, too, in contexts where government services are largely absent. In India, there has been a spread of unregulated low-fee private schools from 2000 onwards. These schools run with minimum infrastructure and resources with teachers on contract, adversely impacting the quality of education.

The South Asia context is grim in terms of adult education. The region was home to half of the world's 774 million illiterate adults estimated for the period 1995-2004. This number may even be largely understated given very



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poor data systems for non-formal education in almost all countries of the sub-region. Despite progress in the past two decades, the number of non-literate adults declined only by 2% from 1985-1994. Most of those left behind are populations suffering multiple layers of economic and social disadvantage - gender, ethnicity, location, age, caste, religion, etc. One of the major challenges is to unlock the latent potential of millions of young people entering the workforce. The technical and vocational education and training (TVET) sector in South Asia is relatively underdeveloped, both in its size and the institutional framework.

Post-independence, the states of Central Asia initiated an effort to adapt their education sectors to the new political, economic, and social circumstances. From among the other regions in the world, only Central Asia, along with Europe and North America, have achieved universal lower secondary completion. But despite such efforts, the education system lacks adequate standards, schools are poorly equipped, and teachers are not trained or paid properly. There are also issues of exclusion, with people with disabilities suffering limited access to educational opportunities at all levels.

There are several factors that affect education in Central Asia. A major gap between rural and urban education impacts quality of learning. The curriculum and training materials at the teacher training institutes are outdated. The weak management and planning of the education sector worsens the situation. Low capacity in policy development, lack of a system of assessment of learning results and effectiveness of education establishments, and the absence of a rational decision making process impacts negatively on the quality of education.

The other major factor in Central Asia is the high rate of migration, especially of young people to Russia. Most of the outgoing migrants specialise in service sectors, including education and medicine, therefore resulting in a brain drain. However, one of the major successes in the region is its adult literacy, with more than 90% literacy rates. Nevertheless, lack of work opportunities within the country forces many to migrate. Education and training systems, specifically TVET, do not meet expectations. TVET faces major constraints, including outdated curriculum and learning materials, obsolete and inadequate equipment, dilapidated school buildings, lack of staff development, little or no linkages with industries, and absence of modern approaches to school management. While a large number of graduates are produced each year, they lack modern skills and qualifications relevant to labor market demands. Non-formal education suffers low priority and recognition from governments. The radicalisation of young people and rising religious extremism is a challenge for education systems in the region to be cognisant of.

Civil society participation in education policy is uneven in Central Asia - where in some countries, it is virtually absent.

EAST ASIA

The most successful developing countries over the last half century have come from East Asia. From very early on, governments in East Asia emphasised primary education. The spread of education throughout rural areas provided the children of farmers with the human capital and skills they would need to operate successfully in non-farming activities. These skills benefited particularly young women who started working in a variety of factories while still living at home and commuting. The emphasis on primary and vocational education prepared the labour force to move out of agriculture and migrate later on to semi-rural and urban regions. The spread of education has been essential for growth and development in East Asia.

Girls' educational attainment has seen significant achievements in East Asia, be it in increased literacy rates, enrolment rates, or completion rates. Equality at the secondary level has been harder to achieve, although China has succeeded or is close, while Mongolia now has a problem of keeping boys, rather than girls, in secondary school. Given how far East Asia has come, little effort is needed to close the remaining gender gaps in secondary education. A greater challenge is to increase the access to secondary education for both boys and girls in these countries by increasing the number of schools in rural and remote areas.

Learning environments are not always inclusive and safe places in East Asia, and can be sites of physical, verbal, psychological and sexual violence, and social exclusion. For children and young people who are perceived as 'different' and who do not fit into dominant cultures in societies, schools can be alienating and marginalising spaces. This is true for some lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) youth who face discrimination, bullying, and violence from their peers and adults in schools, and institutional discrimination through non-inclusive school cultures, facilities, and rules.

Secondary school students in East Asia continue to outperform their peers in other regions of the world. However, Korea's youth has one of the highest suicide rates. Suicide, in fact, is the leading cause of death among



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Koreans aged 15 to 24. Similarly in Japan, the overall suicide rate is roughly 60% higher than the global average. In 2015, suicide was the leading cause of death for Japanese children between the ages of 10 and 19. Intense academic pressure can cause serious stress and anxiety. For those who don't have adequate coping mechanisms and social support, it is an easy road to depression and erosion of self-esteem.

Several governments in East Asia are encouraging the private sector to take a larger role in education provision. In South Korea, for instance, the majority of higher education students are enrolled in private universities, while in Hong Kong, governments have attempted to recover recurrent costs from student tuition fees. Similar strategies are employed in Japan and China. The involvement of the market and private sector and the increase in tuition fees are clear indicators showing the declining role of the state as the primary source of education financing.

The need to facilitate the acquisition and improvement of adult literacy and numeracy skills remains a key challenge facing large populations in the region. The average adult literacy rate in East Asia increased from 82% in 1985–1994 to 92% in 1995–2004. Despite the comparatively high literacy rate in East Asia, 124 million adults, 71% of them women, still lacked basic literacy and numeracy skills according to conventional assessment methods. Between the 80s and the 90s, the number of illiterates decreased dramatically (by 45%) in the region, mainly due to a substantial reduction in China, where 98 million became literate. Progress in China stemmed largely from increased primary school participation, highly-targeted adult literacy programmes, and the wider reach of literate environments.

Most countries in East Asia have yet to seriously address the challenge of meeting the varied learning needs of youth and adults through organised programmes to develop skills (basic, livelihood, life skills) to participate meaningfully in society and to lead more productive and fulfilling lives. Many have put in place non-formal education frameworks with limited geographic coverage. These trends will likely increase disparities in the access of out-of-school youth and adults to lifelong learning opportunities. Pressure for new approaches to this challenge will be especially salient in high-population countries and those with lower literacy rates.

Adult education and lifelong learning are perceived differently across the region - as are the notions of 'citizenship' education or education for 'global citizenship' where in some cases, these are interpreted to promote conformity or acquiescence of citizens to the state. There is also an ongoing conflict/tension between the promotion of universal human rights values and cultural legacies where, very often, cultural considerations take precedence over human rights.

SOUTHEAST ASIA

Despite the modestly positive economic outlook for countries in Southeast Asia, bolstered by its drive towards greater



Civil society movements have thrived in the Southeast Asia, powerfully advancing the cause of good governance.

economic integration through the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), socio-economic disparities and inequalities remain a major characteristic of the development context of the sub-region. They are likewise plagued by increasingly poor governance and institutional quality. The sub-region's vulnerability to natural disasters and the catastrophic impact of climate change also exacerbates these trends in inequality.

The significant unemployment rate in a number of countries in this sub-region is linked to their reliance on the labour export industry. At least six countries in Southeast Asia are considered source countries of international migrants – Philippines, Indonesia, Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar, and Cambodia. While international migration helps these countries afloat and provides a steady source of foreign remittances, especially during times of economic crises, the social costs of migration cannot be underestimated.

In a report published by the ASEAN Secretariat in October 2015 entitled 'ASEAN Regional Assessment of MDG Achievement and Post-2015 Development Priorities', it asserted that economic growth has reduced poverty in ASEAN, but it has not necessarily been pro-poor – that is, growth has not necessarily benefited the poor as much as other groups. It further expounded that uneven access to good jobs remains a critical cause of poverty and that increasing inequality in income and opportunities is a concern also for younger generations. At the same time, as access to education has increased, a great number of young people are not finding productive jobs.

Women, as the Report highlighted, have become more empowered as economic development has proceeded. But there is still a significant gap between women and men in terms of political representation. Meanwhile, the plight of LGBTs in the sub-region remains bleak and outside the domain of social and political protection. They constantly face discrimination, abuse, and rights violations. People with disabilities, ethnic minorities, religious minorities, and indigenous people also face discrimination and other forms of exclusion, including in education. Conflicts and sectarian violence remain critical issues in the sub-region,

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resulting in displacement and enduring humanitarian challenges.

While recognising the challenges in Southeast Asia, ASEAN integration provides an opportunity for member states to tackle issues such as job gains and losses, skill development, wages and productivity, labour migration, and social protection systems. Addressing these key issues will help ensure that more women and men benefit from deeper integration, and vulnerable groups are not left behind.

Democratic spaces for citizen’s engagement and participation are varied within the sub-region - with some countries still under dictatorships or plagued with weak democracies, weak justice systems, and rampant corruption. Although the democratic space has widened in countries like Myanmar and Vietnam, the avenues for genuine citizenship engagement remain precarious and challenging in these countries. Respect for human rights remains challenged with illegal detention, summary executions, and police abuse and torture, still a reality in many countries.

Civil society movements have nonetheless thrived in the sub-region – powerfully advancing the cause of good governance, including in education. Much more needs to be done however in enhancing the substantive participation of marginalised groups in governance at various levels.

The implications of technology in Southeast Asia, especially the immense growth and popularity of social media, is significant. The sub-region has some of the highest social network usage among internet users in the world. While users, especially the youth, are more connected than ever before, technology and social media has also created disparities amongst the older generation and those with limited connectivity.

In the Asia Pacific Regional Education for All Report (EFA Report) published by UNESCO in 2015 which synthesised the National Education for All Reports submitted by countries in the region, it noted that a number of countries in Southeast Asia, such as Indonesia, Vietnam, Malaysia, and Thailand, “*have placed significant effort in devising*

strategies aimed at achieving universal participation in basic education. Many of these countries have achieved positive results. Over time, the countries have thus increasingly turned their attention to improving participation rates in secondary and higher education.” Education quality at all levels, however, remains a problem, especially for education available for low income households.

When it comes to addressing adult illiteracy, the Report cited Cambodia and Timor Leste, which are considered low performers. These two countries will make it difficult to attain higher rates of adult literacy in the future, due also to their problems of low enrolment and high dropout rates in primary education.

The average youth of today is likely to change jobs 10 times or more in their lifetime, compared to three to four times for their parents’ generation. This has huge implications for not only ensuring quality basic education - to secure the strong foundation from which future learning and re-skilling can be built - but of setting in place lifelong learning systems (formal, non-formal, informal) which equip youth and adult learners with the knowledge, skills, competencies, and attitudes they require to adapt to a highly dynamic and changing work and social environment. Much more needs to be done, however, in setting in place lifelong learning education systems in Southeast Asia.

The continued exclusion of the poor and marginalised sectors from accessing education in the region was exacerbated by the fact that countries in Southeast Asia “*still face formidable and ongoing public funding constraints for education*”, as cited in the Report. Challenges in public funding for education in the sub-region have paved the way for anti-poor education financing arrangements, such as the voucher system or education contracting scheme (ESC) in the Philippines which publicly financed the private education sector to provide secondary education without clear accountability mechanisms. Very low budgetary allocations to non-formal education also characterise public education financing in Southeast Asia with an adverse impact on marginalised groups and communities.

In sum, the education and development challenges in Southeast Asia in the coming period remain colossal despite notable progress. The work of civil society movements across sectors continues to be urgent, important, and necessary to put governments to task to deliver on their education and development commitments.

SOUTH PACIFIC

Pacific Island countries have small populations and islands that are scattered over vast distances within the Pacific Ocean. They are especially vulnerable to the impacts of climate change such as rising sea levels and increasing and more intense natural disasters.

The economic structure of many Pacific Islands countries is changing, with a rise in the percentage of GDP in the services sector, largely as a result of increasing tourism

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Participants of the workshop recognised the growing problem of education privatisation and characterised education as serving only market needs in Southeast Asia.

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Non-formal education is not embraced fully as a state responsibility in the Pacific. The number of illiterate youth and adults in the Pacific has risen from 2000 to 2012.

(Fiji, Samoa). Because the economies are small, and industrial development and infrastructure is low, the availability of cash jobs is much lower than there is demand for paid work. High population growth rates in countries such as Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu contribute to high unemployment, especially among the youth. Overseas development assistance (ODA) is and will remain an important part of the economies of Pacific Island countries, given their low population, small tax base, and inability to achieve economies of scale that enable some services to be viable.

Pacific Island countries have been slow in progressing towards gender equality and the empowerment of women. According to a Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat report, in most Pacific Islands countries, there are twice as many men than women in paid employment in the non-agricultural sector. Violence against women, traditional views of women's roles, labour market discrimination, and gender stereotypes are some of the key contributing factors that hinder progress.

Australia and New Zealand have a range of economic and social issues in common. Both have strong economies and regular economic growth, relatively low unemployment, and high GDP per capita. Both have pro-privatisation governments, and both countries face the dilemma of income and wealth inequality. Australia also faces a range of human rights concerns in relation to the treatment of refugees and asylum seekers, Aboriginal incarceration, disability rights, and marriage equality.

The Pacific EFA 2015 Review notes that some progress was made during the Education For All era, for example, an increase in access to primary education. However, it identifies a number of shared challenges and unfinished business in relation to education access and retention, equity, efficiency, quality, education management and data collection, education funding, and coordination. Lack of data collection and poor data quality about education continues to be a key concern in the Pacific. This makes it very difficult to provide definitive analysis on a range of education issues, and to monitor progress over time.



Australia and New Zealand have ageing populations and face the challenge of providing services and income for its older people.

Non-formal education is not embraced fully as a state responsibility in the Pacific. The number of illiterate youth and adults in the Pacific has risen between the years 2000 to 2012. Official youth and adult literacy figures for many Pacific countries are notoriously inaccurate and over-estimated, based on census self-reporting. Collaborative studies by ASPBAE and education coalitions in Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu indicate that literacy levels are around 24-28% for men and 20% or less for women.

There are serious limitations regarding government capacity to plan, budget, and implement education programmes. There is also a lack of coordination among education providers in sub-sectors of pre-primary education, TVET, and non-formal education. Since a large percentage of people in the Pacific do not have paid work, governments and CSOs need to rethink what type of education and learning is relevant to livelihoods, especially to Pacific communities. Traditional ways of learning also need to be recognised and supported and there needs to be avenues for communities to connect to a changing world. There needs to be a change in mindsets away from a 'deficit' approach to a strength-based learning approach that promotes the positives (skills, knowledge, resources) in local communities.

Much work is needed by Pacific national governments and for education policy collaboration to improve education policy, implementation and monitoring, to increase education budgets, and to better align national policies with the new SDG4 international benchmark.

Despite the fact that both New Zealand and Australia have highly developed education systems, there are serious concerns in relation to inequality of education opportunity, and substantial new funding is needed for public schools, especially for poorest groups and areas of greatest disadvantage. In New Zealand, despite a 6-year government literacy and numeracy campaign worth \$250 million, primary school pass rates have not improved, and 25% of children entering high school are below the national standards in reading, writing, and maths. While Australia and New Zealand recognise the SDGs as relevant

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for both internal and for overseas aid policies, it remains to be seen the extent to which the full SDG4 agenda is taken seriously to ensure national education policies are aligned with SDG4.

IMPLICATIONS FOR ASPBAE AS AN ASIA PACIFIC REGIONAL ORGANISATION

Appreciating the current education and development context, ASPBAE members affirmed the value of sustaining the organisation as an Asia Pacific regional organisation advancing the right to transformative, quality education and lifelong learning for all children, youth, and adults. They especially affirmed the importance of ASPBAE's focused attention to advancing the rights, learning needs, and interests of marginalised groups and communities.

Members appreciated the value ASPBAE offers in:

- **Providing training opportunities at the regional, sub-regional, and cross-country levels:** These offer rare opportunities for international exposure and learning that combine theory, skills building, and induction to a wide variety of contexts.
- **Information sharing:** ASPBAE had access to very useful information, given its positions at regional and global policy bodies and civil society networks. ASPBAE shared these important information to its members on a regular basis – with direct benefit to their work. ASPBAE also offered opportunities for information exchange on the rich experience and practice of education advocates and promoters of transformative education in the region – with impact on capacity building and enhancement.
- **Capacity support for education advocacy:** offering a wider platform to deepen the discourse and appreciation of critical education policy issues affecting the whole region.
- **Spurring coordinated, evidence-based advocacy action regionally** on shared issues, with strengthened **grassroots-national-regional-global interface** to bring about policy reforms and change.
- **Giving voice to the positions and perspectives of civil society organisations from the Asia Pacific**, which includes being able to assert the value of institutionalised civil society participation in policy processes at different levels.
- **Institutional and movement building support** enhancing governance systems and promoting efforts to widen the constituency base of ASPBAE's members – especially to bring on board representative youth bodies, especially of marginalised young people; women's organisations; and sub-national, community-based learners groups.
- **Bridging ties between ASPBAE members with other regional and global organisations, and other CSOs**, thus helping them expand their own networks and widen their knowledge.

- **Facilitating greater interface between adult education NGO providers and universities and tertiary education institutions.**
- **Forging new partnerships within the broader SDG agenda, finding common ground with other CSO networks and movements** in such areas as human rights, a focus on marginalised groups and communities, sustainable development, governance and accountability, and in public financing for social services.
- **Promoting solidarity within civil society:** Civil society is under threat in many parts of the region and the world. Popular protest is being criminalised and democratic spaces are shrinking. The right-wing agenda is capturing popular support – as it feeds on the legitimate frustration and desperation of the majority left out of the benefits of a neo-liberal, growth oriented development paradigm. ASPBAE and its members need to reflect on the role of education in this context and how to respond in solidarity with other progressive civil society formations around the world.

Jerald Joseph, former ASPBAE Executive Council member, and incumbent Human Rights Commissioner of Malaysia from civil society, summed up the regional development and education context and provided a human rights perspective to the advancement of education and lifelong learning in the Asia Pacific. He recognised the problem of shrinking democratic spaces that impact civil society and human rights defenders. He observed that civil society needs to analyse how 'people power', which ousted dictatorships a generation ago, seems to have voted into power seemingly oppressive governments. He questioned whether the problem lies with the 'people', or in the inherent flaws in power structures and systems.

Jerald highlighted governments' low budgetary allocations to education, both to formal and non-formal education, which undermines a basic human right. He called for education that is reactive and proactive to people's needs and for good governance in education. To challenge government policies that are not responsive to the needs of the people, Jerald called for political education to form a part of the adult education movement, as well as including a human rights-based approach to education frameworks. He further stressed the importance of linking SDG4 to other SDG targets and components to operationalise a human rights framework - an important feature the SDGs are calling for. Jerald urged ASPBAE, an organisation well placed with international stakeholders, to work towards greater accountability of governments and the international community in defending human rights in education and within the SDGs.

Jerald concluded with highlighting the importance of recognising the universality of human rights in education to enable quality education that is relevant and that meets the diverse needs of people through the region. Traditional culture and values should be recognised and seen in context of dignity and upholding the human rights of all people.

Mapping the next 4 years with ASPBAE's Strategic Directions

During ASPBAE's 6th General Assembly held in 2012, the membership endorsed the continued relevance of ASPBAE's core strategies, which were pursued in the last 4 years. The core strategies are Leadership and Capacity building, Policy Advocacy, Building Strategic Partnerships, and Institutional Development.

This section summarises the analysis of work on ASPBAE's core strategies and the recommendations made by ASPBAE's members at the 7th General Assembly towards their re-contextualisation and enhanced effectiveness.

LEADERSHIP AND CAPACITY BUILDING

To Enhance Youth and Adult Education Practice

ASPBAE's strategy on capacity building for youth and education practice is especially oriented to enhance the competencies of adult

education practitioners among its member organisations. Leadership and capacity building in youth and adult education have been strategic priority areas of ASPBAE for over 20 years. The more current vehicle of its work in leadership and capacity building is the Training for Transformation (TfT) programme which has been a core programmatic expression of this strategy since 2009, and which advances innovative, pro-poor, rights-based adult education through targeted activities.

For the period 2013-2016, ASPBAE's TfT work was organised in the context of the very important historical moment the period represented for ASPBAE and the movement advancing right to education and lifelong learning - ASPBAE's 50th anniversary (2014) and the post-2015 agenda setting processes. The dynamic adult education work of ASPBAE and ASPBAE's members were commemorated and profiled during the 50th anniversary events; likewise, through ASPBAE-led civil society consultations and discussions, the lessons from adult education practice informed the broad-based policy debates and consultations shaping the new global education agenda.

In this period, ASPBAE also began to realise that its TfT work needed to be oriented more strongly to preparing the ASPBAE membership and

constituency to advance the emergent global agenda for education (SDG4 and Education 2030 Framework for Action) and to locate adult education and lifelong learning work within a world and development context in the throes of change. ASPBAE's TfT initiatives in the period were therefore strongly oriented to addressing these emergent themes and issues: Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and climate change, global citizenship, skills for life, and work for women and youth, to name a few. Likewise, it was agreed that it was timely to undertake a review of the TfT programme to assist in locating "ASPBAE's capacity building work as a regional network within the current and future regional and global contexts" and inform ASPBAE's planning for its future leadership and capacity building work.

A key recommendation identified by the review was that the TfT programme was in need of re-contextualisation rather than re-conceptualisation. The ASPBAE TfT programme should be cognizant of the world and regional contextual issues that could be forecast for 2030 in order to consider the capacities that will be required by ASPBAE and its members to further the aims of the adult education movement and to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, especially SDG4. True to its tradition, the TfT should be oriented to ensuring leadership regeneration in ASPBAE and its membership as core to the sustainability of the strong adult education movement for change in the region.

Membership Recommendations for Capacity Building to Enhance Youth and Adult Education Practice

ASPBAE's members recommended for the organisation to:

- Articulate a transformative quality youth and adult education framework that underpins its work and that can be contextualised by the membership in the different arenas they live and work.
- Expand initiatives for knowledge and theory building on transformative youth and



ASPBAE began to realise that its TfT work needed to be oriented more strongly to preparing the ASPBAE membership and constituency to advance the emergent global agenda for education.

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The TjT should be oriented to ensuring leadership regeneration in ASPBAE and its membership.

adult education, grounded and informed by the rich work, especially of civil society in the region, and fostered through communities of practice that ASPBAE will promote. ASPBAE should expand ties with universities and academic institutions also in this regard.

- Strengthen youth participation in ASPBAE’s capacity building work.
- Orient capacity building work towards addressing the new and emergent learning needs of its constituents – in advancing the new education and development agenda (as articulated in the SDGs, Education 2030 Framework for Action) and in strengthening civil society in the region in addressing the challenges to democracy, human rights, global citizenship, sustainable development, and a just peace.
- Leverage ASPBAE members resources, expertise, trainings and capacity building activities and optimise members networks for ‘equal learning’ initiatives along common and new areas of concern, thereby supporting ASPBAE’s ability to respond to expanding demands and expectations of members on capacity building work at national, sub-regional, and regional levels.
- Promote more interactive platforms for information exchange and offer more (online, user-friendly) platforms for members to share about their work/analysis/manuals/initiatives. Build on ASPBAE members’ capacities to expand

ASPBAE’s information outreach e.g. in further disseminating ASPBAE’s communication products, even translating the same to local languages; or in mobilising members to be information posts/hubs for thematic areas of interest to ASPBAE’s membership e.g. gender and decent work, education for sustainable development, lifelong learning, education financing, etc.

- Define clearer mechanisms for follow-through of ASPBAE trainings/events and offer greater clarity on what participants are expected to do after participation in ASPBAE capacity building activities, perhaps in terms of ‘echoing’ results and/or possible coordinated action.
- Strengthen its data collection system to support monitoring and evaluation of ASPBAE’s capacity building work.

For Policy Advocacy on Education and Lifelong Learning

For the period 2013-2016, one of the main areas of ASPBAE’s capacity building work was oriented towards developing the capacities of civil society organisations in advocacy on the right to education and lifelong learning to hold governments, donors, multilateral and intergovernmental bodies, and other decision makers, to account.



There is a need to tap into the key strengths of ASPBAE’s membership to articulate and concretise the education issues of youth and adults.

The Civil Society Education Fund (CSEF) initiative was and remains the main platform upon which ASPBAE pursued its capacity building work for education policy advocacy in the period. Through the last four years, ASPBAE worked with national education campaign coalitions and other CSO networks in 19 countries (India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Vietnam, Cambodia, Timor Leste, Indonesia, Myanmar, the Philippines, PNG, Solomon Islands, Samoa, and Vanuatu), offering national and regional level demand-led, context-based capacity building support as the CSEF Regional Secretariat for the Asia Pacific.

With CSEF as a platform, ASPBAE pursued other more specific capacity building areas for education advocacy, notably on education financing focused on education privatisation through its



The Civil Society Education Fund initiative is the main platform upon which ASPBAE pursued its capacity building work for education policy advocacy, working with national education campaign coalitions and other CSO networks in 19 countries.

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partnership with the Open Society Foundations and with associated members of the Privatisation in Education and Human Rights Consortium. It worked with the Asia Pacific Cultural Centre for UNESCO (ACCU) Japan on capacity building for advocacy on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) through the Centre of Excellence (COE) programme.

Major policy platforms and processes in the period were therefore prime sites for capacity building on advocacy - the processes related to the Decade on Education for Sustainable Development culminating in the 2014 World Summit on ESD in Nagoya, Japan; the CONFINTEA 6 follow up processes, the ASEAN integration processes, to name some. But by far, the most dominant policy space for ASPBAE engagement, and therefore advocacy capacity building, was the post-2015 agenda setting process.

ASPBAE led a coordinated campaign in the region and globally pushing for a wider, rights-based, lifelong learning agenda for education post-2015, strongly attentive to equity, gender justice, and inclusion; to the learning needs of youth and adults; on addressing issues of education financing – demanding higher budgetary support to education, increased and better quality aid, and the adoption of regulatory frameworks and accountability mechanisms on private engagement in the education sector, thwarting the aggressive privatisation push in education which undermines the right to education. The significant presence and strong influence of civil society in the national, regional, and global post-2015 agenda setting processes was due in large part to the capacity and institutional support made available to CSOs by the CSEF initiative and other ASPBAE capacity building efforts.

CSEF renewal for another phase covering a three-year period (2016-2018) offers an opportunity to sustain the work and momentum gained in the previous period. However, more work needs to be done to secure a more sustainable financial base for the

current level of work to continue. For many coalitions, CSEF offers its only source of funding. Diversifying the funding sources supporting capacity building for education advocacy is urgently critical.

ASPBAE recognises that the capacities of member coalitions and other civil society education networks, both in terms of advocacy and institutional strengths, are at varying levels. This presents challenges in terms of greater demand for support and resources to ensure that all coalitions remain robust, active, able to influence and maximise policy spaces, and maintain sound institutional systems.

Membership Recommendations for Capacity Building for Policy Advocacy

ASPBAE's members recommended for the organisation to:

- Pursue new areas for capacity building oriented to ASPBAE's policy advocacy priorities: While attention to the earlier/current policy concerns remain relevant, members mentioned the need for capacity building in new thematic/policy areas included in the wider new education and development agenda (SDG4-SDGs). Earlier methods of capacity support in these new areas such as policy briefs, circulating resource material, developing kits, would remain useful.

- Expand the participation of youth and youth representative organisations in opportunities for capacity building in education advocacy
- Sustain capacity support for evidence-based and context-based advocacy – in such areas as budget advocacy, tracking and analysis; in generating robust alternative CSO data; and in equity-based advocacy (inclusion and participation of marginalised sectors, such as people with disabilities, in advocacy work).
- Continue to providing regional platforms for learning, interaction, sharing of good practice, and deepening policy analysis on priority advocacy issues and concerns.

POLICY ADVOCACY

The past four years, 2013-2016, was an intense period for ASPBAE's education advocacy. It was the time when civil society invigorated its campaigns for governments and donor partners to renew commitments to education. With the sustained education post-2015 campaigns at the country, regional, and global levels, ASPBAE and its members, working closely with its partner civil society network partners globally, contributed much to securing a stand-alone education goal within the



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At the heart of ASPBAE's advocacy was a focus on the right to quality education for all children, youth, and adults and the recognition of education as a public good.

new global development agenda (the Sustainable Development Goals or SDGs).

ASPBAE occupied different policy platforms and spaces regionally and globally which were essential to advancing its core advocacies. At the heart of ASPBAE's advocacy was a focus on the right to quality education for all children, youth, and adults and the recognition of education as a public good. Equity and non-discrimination were priority concerns. In this context, ASPBAE paid special focus on advancing the learning needs of youth and adults, especially from marginalised communities and groups. Home to the largest number of adults denied access to literacy proficiencies, ASPBAE prioritised attention to adult, especially women's, literacy. Education financing was a major focus, premised on a human rights, a social justice perspective, hence a strong push to strengthen the public education system that is of good quality, equitable, life-long, and life-wide. Education for Sustainable Development is ASPBAE's overarching framework for education, envisioning learning that covers all aspects of life – environmental, economic, social, and political, geared towards a sustainable future.

Aside from the post-2015 education and development agenda setting processes, the CONFINTEA 6 follow up processes, the Decade on Education for Sustainable Development (DESD), the UN Decade on Literacy, as well as other UNESCO platforms for adult education, Technical Vocational Education Training (TVET) and youth participation were some of the policy platforms ASPBAE occupied in the



A strong recommendation from ASPBAE members was to identify and expand key partnerships with other sectors to jointly advance the SDGs.

period. ASPBAE took its advocacies against education commercialisation and privatisation to the UN Human rights review mechanisms as well.

Due to consistent, evidence-based, and unrelenting advocacy, ASPBAE and its members have scored advocacy wins. SDG4 is undoubtedly one. ASPBAE secured institutionalised places for civil society in policy bodies such as the EFA Thematic Working Group, now called Education 2030 TWG, the Global Education 2030 Steering Committee, the Board of the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), to name a few. ASPBAE members have become credible voices for civil society in their respective countries as well. In many countries, they sit as regular members in government education sector planning and education review processes.

The past four years witnessed the increased presence and participation of national education coalitions in education policy and programme development. In the Asia Pacific, education coalitions/networks increased from 15 to 19 organisations which includes the recent coming together of CSOs for education advocacy in Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Samoa. The Civil Society Education Fund has enabled CSOs to meaningfully engage their governments and perform their role as watchdogs for transparent governance of education.

For the past four years, an inter-country research and evidence collection on "Public-private partnerships in education" became the backbone of the advocacy against privatisation of education in the

region. A strategy using the human rights mechanism has been employed to expose the impact of privatisation of education on the right to education, especially of marginalised communities.

Membership Recommendations for Policy Advocacy

At ASPBAE's 7th General Assembly, member organisations identified some key recommendations for ASPBAE's policy advocacy initiatives at the national and regional levels. ASPBAE's members recommended for the organisation to:

- Advance the full SDG4- Education 2030 agenda, emphasising the integral place of education in the achievement of all the Sustainable Development Goals and in meeting the contemporary development challenges confronting humanity including growing intolerance, war and conflict, increased inequity and growing poverty, wide-scale unemployment, the climate crisis, and natural disasters.
- Offer a greater focus on youth and adult non-formal education as these areas remain ignored and have been consistently sidelined in the discussions on financing and implementation to date. Youth and adult literacy is a right and an essential tool to fight poverty, for decent work and livelihoods, good health, a life of dignity, and meaningful participation in the social, economic, political processes that profoundly impact peoples' lives. As the only regional CSO organisation focusing on youth and adult education, ASPBAE needs to double up advocacy efforts in this respect – addressing issues of equity, quality, inclusion, and financing.
- Strengthen national level efforts to concretise SDG4 and the 'education we want', linked to regional and global SDG follow up processes: The SDG 4 policy framework offers a powerful means to push the education reform agenda of civil society at the country level. The SDG follow up mechanisms put the onus of

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concretising SDG4 squarely at the country level – in national government-led processes with the participation of all stakeholders, including civil society. This would be a focus of ASPBAE and its members’ efforts in the coming period. Through its national coalition members, ASPBAE can strengthening partnerships with teachers’ unions and associations, with youth and learners organisations, and other stakeholder groups to localise and implement SDG4.

However, ASPBAE and its members will also need to realise that their change agenda – concretising their alternative vision of education – need not be advanced solely through the SDG country processes and spaces. Members should find the most effective and strategic policy arenas at the country level and engage these. They should also be prepared to create their own spaces for engagement, resistance, and protest.

- Assert institutionalised participation of civil society in the SDG follow up processes at country, regional, and global levels and challenge attempts to criminalise legitimate protest of civil society and repression of human rights.
- Sustain efforts to advocate for the strengthening of public education systems that ensure provision of education that is of good quality, inclusive, equitable, lifelong, and life-wide. Sustain and expand efforts that challenge education privatisation and commercialisation which undermines the right to education of all.
- While sustaining ASPBAE’s presence in existing policy platforms globally and regionally, expand engagement with sub-regional intergovernmental bodies (e.g. SAARC, ASEAN, SEAMEO, Pacific Islands Forum, Mekong Region Development) and human rights treaty mechanisms to advance SDG4 and the right to

education.

- Expand policy research and analysis in support of ASPBAE’s policy change agenda and covering the areas of education financing, governance and accountability, gender equality, equity, youth and adult literacy, skills for decent work, Global citizenship education, ESD, and lifelong learning.

BUILDING STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

Members highlighted the value of ASPBAE’s efforts in bridging ASPBAE members with other regional and global civil society organisations and networks, thus helping them expand their own networks and widen their knowledge. They appreciated ASPBAE having facilitated and forged formalised, institutionalised partnerships between them and global policy platforms e.g. within the UNESCO Collective Consultations of NGO on EFA (CC NGO/EFA), Global Partnership for Education (GPE), and various UNESCO platforms and processes.

Some members (India and Australia consultations) highlighted the importance of facilitating interface between adult education NGO providers and universities and tertiary education institutions. Apart from universities being strong sites for adult education – through teaching and extension work - the professionalisation and enhanced quality of adult education rests in a strong foundation of university-based adult education research, theory-building, and scholarship, which should be promoted.

Membership Recommendations for Building Strategic Partnerships

ASPBAE’s members recommended for the organisation to:

- Promote greater interaction of adult education practitioners and education advocates in ASPBAE’s membership: Several members observed that much more can be done to secure a better complementation of work

between ASPBAE members primarily oriented to advocacy - notably the national education campaign coalitions - and other members primarily oriented to enhancing the practice of adult education – towards a policy reform agenda for youth and adult education. There is such rich experience in adult education practice that can be harnessed to inform the alternative policy assertions of CSOs on adult education and lifelong learning.

- Define clearer coordination modes for ASPBAE members, especially nationally and sub-regionally - for advocacy, or to facilitate communities of practice, or just information sharing on ASPBAE related activities.
- Engage with other players outside the education sector: Advancing a lifelong learning policy agenda necessitates promoting inter-sectorality in education (formal, non-formal, informal spheres of education) and inter-sectoral engagement (education with other sectors of development). ASPBAE’s strategic partnerships need to therefore extend outside of the traditional foci of education policy – Ministries of labour, health, environment, to name examples.
- Expand involvement in the SDG follow up processes in the region and globally to ensure that SDG4-Education 2030 remains prominent in the global policy discourse on development.

INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Members were appreciative of ASPBAE being an accountable, democratically functioning organisation with a strong, committed, professional staff complement. The highly participatory and transparent governance processes within the 7th General Assembly were testimony to this. They however offered some suggestions to strengthen ASPBAE’s institutional functioning.

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ASPBAE Membership and Governance

ASPBAE works at the national, regional, and global level to advance the right to basic and adult education and learning, gender justice, equity, and peace. ASPBAE derives



ASPBAE derives its strength and identity from its membership base that is diverse and dynamic.

its strength and identity from its membership base that is diverse and dynamic. ASPBAE’s membership is comprised of community based organisations, NGOs, women’s organisations, popular education groups, educational institutions, national education campaign coalitions, national adult education networks, and individuals. The members play an intrinsic and vital role in shaping ASPBAE’s work and future directions.

ASPBAE celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2014. The now 52 year old regional organisation is the only network in the Asia South Pacific with over 150 members and close to 100 individual members across 30 countries that is promoting basic and

adult education within a rights-based and lifelong learning framework. A network like ASPBAE that is spread across many countries and has a diverse and dynamic membership offers profound advantages and opportunities. It offers strong credibility to advocate the right to education and lifelong learning at several levels - national, regional, and global. It makes possible a powerful articulation and representation of a strong Asia Pacific civil society voice, drawn from the perspectives and realities of vibrant education civil society organisations operating in the region. Finally, a network of this breadth offers a valuable and significant space for cross-country learning and solidarity – vital for advancing the practice of transformative education and lifelong learning.

Sustaining this broad, regional membership-based organisation however, comes with its own challenges. The leadership and membership of ASPBAE have been grappling with a number of such strategic concerns. Some members stay very actively involved in a range of ASPBAE initiatives, aligning significant parts of their work with coordinated actions agreed regionally with ASPBAE; some are more selective or activity/event-based in their involvement, usually connecting on issues/themes directly relevant to their work; and still some stay on the periphery and play the role of observers, (passive) supporters. Regional ASPBAE activities also tend to be located in countries more



ASPBAE celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2014.

easily accessible to participants from all over – so the more remote sub-regions/countries, e.g. small island states of the South Pacific or Central Asian countries, tend to lose out in opportunities to host ASPBAE events and members from these areas get to participate less frequently. Overall declines in funding available to ASPBAE also impact on the subsidized opportunities for members’ participation in regional/sub-regional events. Accelerated resource mobilisation efforts have been pursued to address this, including a call for members to share costs of their participation in ASPBAE events.

Over the last 4 years, ASPBAE has very deliberately set in place efforts to expand its presence in countries of the region where its involvement has been erstwhile limited. It pursued dedicated expansion efforts in Korea on the plank of the World Education Forum 2015. Through the CSEF Phase 3 initiative and strong support from DVVI, specifically in Central Asia, ASPBAE has recently been able to expand work in Afghanistan,



Over the last 4 years, ASPBAE continued to strengthen collaboration with its partners such as DVV International, ICAE, and GCE.



ASPBAE pursued dedicated expansion efforts in Korea, Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Samoa.

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Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan in South and Central Asia and in Samoa in the South Pacific. Yet, a stronger membership and programmatic presence in Fiji – the small island state with the largest population in Polynesia and a hub for South Pacific civil society, policy, and education engagements - would be strategic. ASPBAE's presence in East Asia, overall, still remains generally low - it has no organisational members in China, Hong Kong SAR, Macau SAR, and Taiwan. Locating strong civil society organisations on education with the same value-base as ASPBAE in these areas has been challenging. Language also poses some constraints. A more effective and resourced strategy for expansion, especially in China, will need to be defined and pursued.

Payment of membership dues forms part of ASPBAE members' obligations and responsibilities. It is clear that these constitute only one part of membership contributions to ASPBAE - many members contribute far more in kind - through the professional volunteer time members offer; in ASPBAE's access to the wealth of institutional knowledge, contacts, partnerships that come with each member; in the mutual credibility gained by association with members' competent, valuable work. Nonetheless, there is a special value membership dues offer to ASPBAE – in ways they can solidly contribute to organisational independence and autonomy. The membership needs to reflect on this, and this consideration should strongly inform a review of ASPBAE's membership fee structure, which has not been amended since 2001.

Membership Recommendations on Membership and Governance

Members stressed the importance of expanding ASPBAE's presence in East Asia, notably in China. ASPBAE should work with its membership to enable a stand-alone sub-region for Central Asia (currently part of Sub-Region 1 or South and Central Asia). A further recommendation was to facilitate

better communication, coordination, dialogue, and cooperation between national coalitions and ASPBAE members who are not part of these coalitions and for ASPBAE to help build constituencies for critical stakeholder groups i.e. youth, women, indigenous people. There was a recommendation to amend the membership fee structure, cognisant of the importance of membership contributions in securing a more autonomous functioning of ASPBAE.

Information and Communications

In the period 2013-2016, ASPBAE's initiatives in several regional and global education forums remained an integral part of its advocacy work. Communication was central to the way ASPBAE positioned itself internally and to the outside world. It relied on strategic communications for internal membership consolidation, for building bridges of learning and solidarity amongst its diverse member organisations, and as a tool for policy engagement, advocacy, and campaigns. ASPBAE's communication strategy cut across various thematic issues and member organisations to meeting the goals of raising awareness, lobbying, information sharing, networking, capacity building, and branding.

ASPBAE sought to further broaden its communication initiatives and develop more systematic methods of information sharing and communicating for membership consolidation and governance, programmes, and advocacy. The aim was to build understanding and support for its programmes, advocacy, and campaigns work; further integrate communications with the way the ASPBAE network functions; and raise the impact of its communication tools.

ASPBAE's information and communications programme in the last 4 years entailed using communications increasingly as a tool to enhance ASPBAE's mandate and initiatives, coordinating outreach efforts across the organisation, and using communication products more strategically and effectively. ASPBAE's newsletter, Ed-lines, and the monthly Bulletin have encouraged an exchange of ideas and have provided a platform for accessing timely information and analytical perspectives to several issues related to education and lifelong learning. Members have expressed that the information available to them through ASPBAE's regular communication tools has helped enrich their understanding



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of issues while planning for their work and that it has inspired them to develop new ideas. Members also feel encouraged to proactively contribute to ASPBAE's communications tools and spread information and knowledge, best practices, and lessons learnt through the region.

As ASPBAE continues to play an important role as a vibrant civil society network in the Asia Pacific, there are several challenges that have emerged as its communications programme has grown and expanded over the last several years. In the numerous national, regional, and global policy platforms ASPBAE participates in, it is important for the organisation to have speedy access to information, key developments, and decisions made in order for the information to be showcased to the membership and to a wider audience in a speedy and timely manner. With civil society networks from other regions also implementing robust communication programmes, it is relevant for ASPBAE to be more efficient in its information dissemination.

Whether for ASPBAE's Training for Transformation programme or its policy advocacy work, a more concerted effort is needed towards highlighting ASPBAE's thematic messages through its several communication channels, especially social media. While social media is being used to showcase events and activities of ASPBAE and its members, the platform should be expanded to relay ASPBAE's main messages on the several issues it works on related to adult education and lifelong learning. As young people become an increasingly important constituency in the new development and education agenda, it is important for ASPBAE to strategically include young people as an emerging target audience in its communications programme and tailor some of its communications to reach the youth. It is also important for ASPBAE to adopt a 2-way process of engaging the youth in developing communication

tools relevant to them.

With successful communication workshops in several parts of the region held from 2013-2016, ASPBAE is keen to further engage with its member organisations on their communication needs and requirements and explore avenues for capacity building support to enhance communication skills amongst its membership.

Membership Recommendations on Information and Communications

Members recommended that ASPBAE should look into re-orienting its information and communication strategy to more actively engage its members to take an active part in ASPBAE'S advocacy. It should consider what actions members can be involved in or initiate to support the advocacy work of ASPBAE, particularly in times where the organisation is engaged in highly important meetings or events that require "virtual mobilisation". In order to be able to do this, information and messages should go beyond events, or what is happening. Information should inform and initiate dialogue, discussion, and make people act locally – connecting the local to the global. The timing of those messages is important. They should be aligned to what is happening and what ASPBAE is doing. Social media should be further maximized and ASPBAE should tap in to good examples to engage youth, i.e. short films, competitions, visuals. ASPBAE could explore producing a 'Do It Yourself' campaign tool kit that offers guidance on writing, messaging, effective use of images, and other tips and tricks of conducting a successful campaign. An overall recommendation was for ASPBAE to re-think and re-orient its information and communications work to keep abreast with a fast changing world, to involve the youth, and to enable a regular flow of ASPBAE's main advocacy and campaign messages to its membership and to a wider audience through its several communication tools and channels.



ASPBAE's communication strategy cut across various thematic issues to meet the goals of raising awareness, lobbying, information sharing, networking, capacity building, and branding.

Resource Mobilisation

ASPBAE needs to keep alert, be proactive in chasing resource opportunities, and to diversify its sources of funding to guard against unexpected adverse changes from one donor or another.

Funds guaranteed for 2016-18 from the Civil Society Education Fund (CSEF) was a significant boost. ASPBAE also maintains a good relationship with Open Society Foundations (OSF). Funding has also been obtained from the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL). A key to all of this is the need to keep providing quality work, professional timely reporting, and openness to collaboration.

One ongoing challenge for ASPBAE is to secure and/or develop income streams that can build ASPBAE's reserves to a point where it is able to 'future proof' itself to some degree, at least for a number of years for its independence and institutional stability.

Membership Recommendations on Resource Mobilisation

Some of the key recommendations from ASPBAE's members were to explore engagement with corporate organisations and tap in to CSR allocations; produce multi-country joint proposals to bilateral and multilateral organisations; tap in to individual donations and enable on-line platforms for raising funds; invest to raise resources (competent volunteers, full-time staff); and have a clear resource mobilisation strategy with specific outcomes.

In the words of ASPBAE's Strategic Partners...

**Sandy Morrison, President,
International Council of Adult
Education (ICAE)**

There is a reaffirmation of the strategy on leadership and capacity building amongst ASPBAE's membership, a reaffirmation of the principles of adult education. Let us be clear why we are doing this, what for and who for? We need to know clear outputs for our learners.

There is no one programme that is going to answer all questions. The policy architecture is changing all the time and it is difficult to keep up to speed with that. We have to understand our limitations as well our strengths. If we want transformation for our communities, we have to understand how we do things, why we do things, and we can reflect as individuals and within our communities. In this theoretical transformation, we need to acknowledge the work that has already been done, and the work that is yet to be done, so that we can then achieve what we all want – where no one is left behind, no village is left behind, and no nation is left behind.

**Rasheda Choudhury,
Executive Director, CAMPE,
and Vice President, Global
Campaign for Education
(GCE)**

I have learnt from young people. The youth have expressed their concerns and their expectations. In Bangladesh,

CAMPE runs a campaign every year. We ask, 'what type of a budget do we want from the government', at the grassroots level. We want better toilets in schools. We want our girls to feel safe to go to school. Policies and advocacy should be implemented at the grassroots level. Evidence-based advocacy, transparency, and accountability of all the actors is very important. However, we must not lose site of the fact that those at the grassroots are the ones who know best the realities they live in. They know where the shoe pinches the most. It is important we listen to them and ensure that their realities guide us in our advocacies.

**Eri Yamamoto, Director,
Shanti Volunteer Association
(SVA) and ASPBAE EC
member (2017-2020)**

We have to think how ASPBAE can benefit new organisations to join the membership. In Japan, organisations working at the national level and those working at the global level have been working separately. There has been no coordination amongst them. How can ASPBAE bridge gaps such as these?

**Uwe Gartenschlaeger,
Regional Director for South
and South East Asia,
DVV International**

We invested in the European Association for the Education for Adults (EAEA) by having Board meetings in countries and sub-regions that were not as well represented in the Association. We used these Board meetings to meet with potential members, universities, and government partners to build networks in these countries and regions and we used the opportunity to strengthen our membership. It would be good

for ASPBAE to use the next 2 years to focus on such countries and invest in building relationships and networks there. Also, the world expects you to bring China on board. China is a country with growing importance not only in the Asia Pacific, but in Europe as well.

We are the voice of non-formal education. We are the voice of adult education. We should be careful not to lose our profile. We should focus on our core business. Our core business is movements, non-formal education. The formal system has powerful voices and powerful structures. We should align with the formal education system, but we should not lose focus of what are priorities are and what our profile is.

I congratulate ASPBAE for the communication strategy you have. It is always a pleasure to read through your materials. I feel quite well informed through ASPBAE's communication tools. However, when you communicate, it is important to think of the capacities of the recipients. The length of the materials can be quite long. Keep the communication short.

In EAEA, one-third of our budget is membership fees. In ASPBAE the fees is a concern. You should consider that those who are better off, should contribute more.

DVV has three roles – it is a donor organisation, a development partner, and a member of the adult education movement. We are privileged because the German government deems it important to finance our work. However, DVV is happy to participate in the movement at the same level, and not at a 'superior' level just because we have the money.

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